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NSC BRIEFING

LAOS

25 27 May 1959
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- I. Tension in Laos continuing.
- II. Defected Communist Pathet Lao battalion (approximately 700 men) loosely encircled by Laotian army forces but its commander has broken off surrender talks initiated by government.
 - A. The Laotian army believes the commander, a fanatical Communist, is acting on own initiative.
 1. We have report that defection possibly ordered by Hanoi.
- III. Laotian army, however, still holding door open for battalion to return to its camp and integrate.
 - A. High-ranking officer has advised government to require Communist political chief Souphannouvong to make on the spot appeal to battalion.
- IV. Fighting so far limited to exchange of fire between advance patrols on 23 and 25 May.
- V. Laotians fear Pathet battalion will escape and renew guerrilla warfare.
 - A. We have reports that about 500 demobilized former Pathet soldiers have formed into armed unit in northern Laos, and other groups said to be gathering elsewhere.
 - B. Also, there is unconfirmed report that an estimated 50 Communist Vietnamese soldiers wearing Laotian uniforms have crossed into Laos.
- VI. In view these developments, government increasingly disposed take drastic action against battalion.

A. Foreign Minister has asked US material and financial support for plan to bring unit under control by force.

VII. Pro-Communist political leaders in Vientiane are under house arrest and influential crown prince reportedly urging government to begin repressive campaign against domestic Communists.

A. Foreign minister says decision on matter to come this week.

VIII. Communist bloc capitalizing on these incidents in concerted campaign to reconvene the International Control Commission (ICC) in Laos.

A. Since crisis developed on 11 May, Hanoi and Peiping have both made appeals on ICC to Geneva co-chairmen--UK and USSR--and Hanoi has made direct approach to India on its capacity as chairman of ICC.